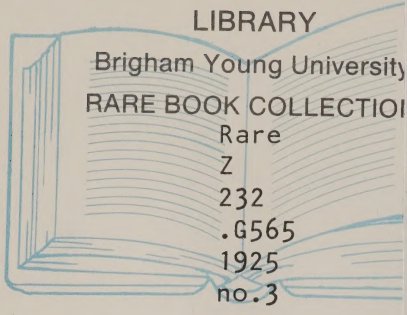


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PRINTED AND MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN

PICTOR IGNOTUS,  
FRA LIPPO LIPPI,  
ANDREA DEL SARTO

BY  
ROBERT BROWNING

THE  
GOLDEN COCKEREL PRESS  
MCMXXV.





## PICTOR IGNOTUS

(FLORENCE, 15—)

I COULD have painted pictures like that youth's  
Ye praise so. How my soul springs up! No bar  
Stayed me—ah, thought which saddens while it soothes!  
—Never did fate forbid me, star by star,  
To outburst on your night with all my gift  
Of fires from God: nor would my flesh have shrunk  
From seconding my soul, with eyes uplift  
And wide to heaven, or, straight like thunder, sunk  
To the centre, of an instant; or around  
Turned calmly and inquisitive, to scan  
The licence and the limit, space and bound,  
Allowed to Truth made visible in Man.  
And, like that youth ye praise so, all I saw,  
Over the canvas could my hand have flung,  
Each face obedient to its passion's law,  
Each passion clear proclaimed without a tongue;  
Whether Hope rose at once in all the blood,  
A-tiptoe for the blessing of embrace,  
Or Rapture drooped the eyes, as when her brood  
Pull down the nesting dove's heart to its place;  
Or Confidence lit swift the forehead up,  
And locked the mouth fast, like a castle braved,—

O human faces, hath it spilt, my cup?

What did ye give me that I have not saved?  
Nor will I say I have not dreamed (how well!)

Of going—I, in each new picture,—forth,  
As, making new hearts beat and bosoms swell,  
To Pope or Kaiser, East, West, South or North,  
Bound for the calmly satisfied great State,

Or glad aspiring little burgh, it went,  
Flowers cast upon the car which bore the freight,  
Through old streets named afresh from its event,  
Till it reached home, where learned Age should greet

My face, and Youth, the star not yet distinct  
Above his hair, lie learning at my feet!—

Oh, thus to live, I and my picture, linked  
With love about, and praise, till life should end,

And then not go to heaven, but linger here,  
Here on my earth, earth's every man my friend,—

The thought grew frightful, 'twas so wildly dear!  
But a voice changed it. Glimpses of such sights

Have scared me, like the revels through a door  
Of some strange house of idols at its rites!

This world seemed not the world it was before:  
Mixed with my loving trusting ones, there trooped

. . . Who summoned those cold faces that begun  
To press on me and judge me? Though I stooped  
Shrinking, as from the soldiery a nun,



They drew me forth, and spite of me . . . enough!  
These buy and sell our pictures, take and give,  
Count them for garniture and household-stuff,  
And where they live our pictures needs must live  
And see their faces, listen to their prate,  
Partakers of their daily pettiness,  
Discussed of,—‘This I love, or this I hate,  
This likes me more, and this affects me less!’  
Wherefore I chose my portion. If at whiles  
My heart sinks, as monotonous I paint  
These endless cloisters and eternal aisles  
With the same series, Virgin, Babe and Saint,  
With the same cold calm beautiful regard,—  
At least no merchant traffics in my heart;  
The sanctuary’s gloom at least shall ward  
Vain tongues from where my pictures stand apart:  
Only prayer breaks the silence of the shrine  
While, blackening in the daily candle-smoke,  
They moulder on the damp wall’s travertine,  
’Mid echoes the light footstep never woke.  
So die, my pictures! surely, gently die!  
Oh youth, men praise so,—holds their praise its worth?  
Blown harshly, keeps the trump its golden cry?  
Tastes sweet the water with such specks of earth?



## FRA LIPPO LIPPI

I AM poor brother Lippo, by your leave!  
You need not clap your torches to my face.  
Zooks, what's to blame? you think you see a monk?  
What, it's past midnight, and you go the rounds,  
And here you catch me at an alley's end  
Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar?  
The Carmine's my cloister: hunt it up,  
Do,—harry out, if you must show your zeal,  
Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,  
And nip each softling of a wee white mouse,  
*Weke, weke*, that's crept to keep him company!  
Aha, you know your betters! Then you'll take  
Your hand away that's fiddling on my throat,  
And please to know me likewise. Who am I?  
Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend  
Three streets off—he's a certain . . . how d'ye call?  
Master—a . . . Cosimo of the Medici,  
In the house that caps the corner. Boh! you were best!  
Remember and tell me, the day you're hanged,  
How you affected such a gullet's-gripe!  
But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves  
Pick up a manner nor discredit you.  
Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the streets  
And count fair prize what comes into their net?



He's Judas to a tittle, that man is!  
Just such a face! why, sir, you make amends.  
Lord, I'm not angry! Bid your hangdogs go  
Drink out this quarter-florin to the health  
Of the munificent House that harbours me  
(And many more beside, lads! more beside!)  
And all's come square again. I'd like his face—  
His, elbowing on his comrade in the door  
With the pike and lantern,—for the slave that holds  
John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair  
With one hand ('look you now,' as who should say)  
And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped!  
It's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,  
A wood-coal or the like? or you should see!  
Yes, I'm the painter, since you style me so.  
What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down,  
You know them and they take you, like enough!  
I saw the proper twinkle in your eye—  
'Tell you, I liked your looks at very first.  
Let's sit and set things straight now, hip to haunch.  
Here's spring come, and the nights one makes up bands  
To roam the town and sing out carnival,  
And I've been three weeks shut within my mew,  
A-painting for the great man, saints and saints  
And saints again. I could not paint all night—  
Ouf! I leaned out of window for fresh air.

There came a hurry of feet and little feet,  
A sweep of lute-strings, laughs, and whiffs of song,—  
*Flower o' the broom,*  
*Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!*  
*Flower o' the quince,*  
*I let Lisa go, and what good's in life since?*  
*Flower o' the thyme*—and so on. Round they went.  
Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter  
Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight,—three slim shapes—  
And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir, flesh and blood,  
That's all I'm made of! Into shreds it went,  
Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,  
All the bed-furniture—a dozen knots,  
There was a ladder! down I let myself,  
Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,  
And after them. I came up with the fun  
Hard by Saint Laurence, hail fellow, well met,—  
*Flower o' the rose,*  
*If I've been merry, what matter who knows?*  
And so as I was stealing back again  
To get to bed and have a bit of sleep  
Ere I rise up to-morrow and go work  
On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast  
With his great round stone to subdue the flesh,  
You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see!  
Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your head—

Mine's shaved,—a monk, you say,—the sting's in that!  
If Master Cosimo announced himself,  
Mum's the word naturally; but a monk!  
Come, what am I a beast for? tell us, now!  
I was a baby when my mother died  
And father died and left me in the street.  
I starved there, God knows how, a year or two  
On fig skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,  
Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day  
My stomach being empty as your hat,  
The wind doubled me up and down I went.  
Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,  
(Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)  
And so along the wall, over the bridge,  
By the straight cut to the convent. Six words, there,  
While I stood munching my first bread that month:  
'So, boy, you're minded,' quoth the good fat father  
Wiping his own mouth, 'twas refection-time,—  
'To quit this very miserable world!  
Will you renounce?' . . . The mouthful of bread? thought I;  
By no means! Brief, they made a monk of me;  
I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,  
Palace, farm, villa, shop and banking-house,  
Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici  
Have given their hearts to—all at eight years old.  
Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,



'Twas not for nothing—the good bellyful,  
The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,  
And day-long blessed idleness beside!  
'Let's see what the urchin's fit for'—that came next.  
Not overmuch their way, I must confess.  
Such a to-do! they tried me with their books.  
Lord, they'd have taught me Latin in pure waste!  
*Flower o' the clove,*  
*All the Latin I construe is, 'amo' I love!*  
But, mind you, when a boy starves in the streets  
Eight years together, as my fortune was,  
Watching folk's faces to know who will fling  
The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he desires,  
And who will curse or kick him for his pains—  
Which gentleman processional and fine,  
Holding a candle to the Sacrament  
Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch  
The droppings of the wax to sell again,  
Or holla for the Eight and have him whipped,—  
How say I?—nay, which dog bites, which lets drop  
His bone from the heap of offal in the street,—  
Why, soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,  
He learns the look of things, and none the less  
For admonitions from the hunger-pinch.  
I had a store of such remarks, be sure,  
Which, after I found leisure, turned to use:

I drew men's faces on my copy-books,  
Scrawled them within the antiphony's marge,  
Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,  
Found nose and eyes and chin for A.s and B.s,  
And made a string of pictures of the world  
Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,  
On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks looked black.  
'Nay,' quoth the Prior, 'turn him out, d'ye say?  
In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.  
What if at last we get our man of parts,  
We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese  
And Preaching Friars, to do our Church up fine  
And put the front on it that ought to be!  
And hereupon they bade me daub away.  
Thank you! my head being crammed, their walls a blank,  
Never was such prompt disemburdening.  
First, every sort of monk, the black and white,  
I drew them, fat and lean: then, folks at church,  
From good old gossips waiting to confess  
Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-ends,—  
To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,  
Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there  
With the little children round him in a row  
Of admiration, half for his beard and half  
For that white anger of his victim's son  
Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,

Signing himself with the other because of Christ  
(Whose sad face on the cross sees only this  
After the passion of a thousand years)  
Till some poor girl, her apron o'er her head  
Which the intense eyes looked through, came at eve  
On tip-toe, said a word, dropped in a loaf,  
Her pair of earrings and a bunch of flowers  
The brute took growling, prayed, and then was gone.  
I painted all, then cried 'tis ask and have—  
Choose, for more's ready!—laid the ladder flat,  
And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall.  
The monks closed in a circle and praised loud  
Till checked,—taught what to see and not to see,  
Being simple bodies,—'that's the very man!  
Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog!  
That woman's like the Prior's niece who comes  
To care about his asthma: it's the life!  
But there my triumph's straw-fire flared and funk—  
Their betters took their turn to see and say:  
The Prior and the learned pulled a face  
And stopped all that in no time. 'How? what's here?  
Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all!  
Faces, arms, legs and bodies like the true  
As much as pea and pea! it's devil's-game!  
Your business is not to catch men with show,  
With homage to the perishable clay,

But lift them over it, ignore it all,  
Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.  
Your business is to paint the souls of men—  
Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke . . . no it's not . . .  
It's vapour done up like a new-born babe—  
(In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)  
It's . . . well, what matters talking, it's the soul!  
Give us no more of body than shows soul!  
Here's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God,  
That set's you praising,—why not stop with him?  
Why put all thoughts of praise out of our heads  
With wonder at lines, colours, and what not?  
Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!  
Rub all out, try at it a second time.  
Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts,  
She's just my niece . . . Herodias, I would say,—  
Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off—  
Have it all out!' Now, is this sense, I ask?  
A fine way to paint soul, by painting body  
So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further  
And can't fare worse! Thus yellow does for white  
When what you put for yellow's simply black,  
And any sort of meaning looks intense  
When all beside itself means and looks naught.  
Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn,  
Left foot and right foot, go a double step,



Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,  
Both in their order? Take the prettiest face,  
The Prior's niece . . . patron-saint—is it so pretty  
You can't discover if it mean's hope, fear,  
Sorrow or joy? won't beauty go with these?  
Suppose I've made her eyes all right and blue,  
Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,  
And then add soul and heighten them threefold?  
Or say there's beauty with no soul at all—  
(I never saw it—put the case the same—)  
If you get simple beauty and nought else,  
You get about the best thing God invents,—  
That's somewhat. And you'll find the soul you have missed,  
Within yourself when you return Him thanks,  
'Rub all out!' Well, well, there's my life, in short.  
And so the thing has gone on ever since.  
I'm grown a man no doubt, I've broken bounds—  
You should not take a fellow eight years old  
And make him swear to never kiss the girls,  
I'm my own master, paint now as I please—  
Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house!  
Lord, it's fast holding by the rings in front—  
Those great rings serve more purposes than just  
To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse!  
And yet the old schooling sticks, the old grave eyes  
Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,

The heads shake still—'It's Art's decline, my son!  
You're not of the true painters, great and old;  
Brother Angelico's the man, you'll find;  
Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer:  
Fag on at flesh, you'll never make the third!

*Flower o' the pine,*

*You keep your mistr... manners, and I'll stick to mine!*

I'm not the third, then: bless us, they must know!

Don't you think they're the likeliest to know,

They with their Latin? so, I swallow my rage,

Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint

To please them—sometimes do, and sometimes don't,

For, doing most, there's pretty sure to come

A turn, some warm eve finds me at my saints—

A laugh, a cry, the business of the world—

*(Flower o' the peach*

*Death for us all, and his own life for each!)*

And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over,

The world and life's too big to pass for a dream,

And I do these wild things in sheer despite,

And play the fooleries you catch me at,

In pure rage! the old mill horse, out at grass

After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so,

Although the miller does not preach to him

The only good of grass is to make chaff.

What would men have? Do they like grass or no—

May they or mayn't they? all I want's the thing,  
Settled for ever one way: as it is,  
You tell too many lies and hurt yourself.  
You don't like what you only like too much,  
You do like what, if given you at your word,  
You find abundantly detestable.  
For me, I think I speak as I was taught—  
I always see the Garden and God there  
A-making man's wife—and, my lesson learned,  
The value and significance of flesh,  
I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards.

You understand me: I'm a beast, I know.  
But see, now—why, I see as certainly  
As that the morning-star's about to shine,  
What will hap some day. We've a youngster here  
Comes to our convent, studies what I do,  
Slouches and stares and lets no atom drop—  
His name is Guidi—he'll not mind the monks—  
They call him Hulking Tom, he lets them talk—  
He picks my practice up—he'll paint apace,  
I hope so—though I never live so long,  
I know what's sure to follow. You be judge!  
You speak no Latin more than I, belike—  
However, you're my man, you've seen the world  
—The beauty and the wonder and the power,

The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,  
Changes, surprises,—and God made it all!  
—For what? do you feel thankful, ay or no,  
For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,  
The mountain round it and the sky above,  
Much more the figures of man, woman, child,  
These are the frame to? What's it all about?  
To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,  
Wondered at? oh, this last of course!—you say.  
But why not do as well as say,—paint these  
Just as they are, careless what comes of it?  
God's works—paint anyone, and count it crime  
To let a truth slip. Don't object, 'His works  
Are here already—nature is complete:  
Suppose you reproduce her—(which you can't)  
There's no advantage! you must beat her, then.'  
For, don't you mark, we're made so that we love  
First when we see them painted, things we have passed  
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;  
And so they are better, painted—better to us,  
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that—  
God uses us to help each other so,  
Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,  
Your cullion's hanging face? A bit of chalk,  
And trust me but you should, though! How much more,  
If I drew higher things with the same truth!



That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place,  
Interpret God to all of you! oh, oh,  
It makes me mad to see what men shall do  
And we in our graves! This world's no blot for us,  
Nor blank—it means intensely, and means good:  
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.  
'Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer!'  
Strikes in the Prior: 'when your meaning's plain  
It does not say to folks—remember matins,  
Or, mind you fast next Friday.' Why, for this  
What need of art at all? A skull and bones,  
Two bits of stick nailed cross-wise, or, what's best,  
A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.  
I painted a Saint Laurence six months since  
At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style:  
'How looks my painting, now the scaffold's down?'  
I ask a brother: 'Hugely,' he returns—  
'Already not one phiz of your three slaves  
That turn the Deacon off his toasted side,  
But's scratched and prodded to our heart's content,  
The pious people have so eased their own  
When coming to say prayers there in a rage:  
We get on fast to see the bricks beneath.  
Expect another job this time next year,  
For pity and religion grow i' the crowd—  
Your painting serves its purpose!' Hang the fools!

—That is—you'll not mistake an idle word  
Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,  
Tasting the air this spicy night which turns  
The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine!  
Oh, the church knows! don't misreport me, now!  
It's natural a poor monk out of bounds  
Should have his apt word to excuse himself:  
And hearken how I plot to make amends.  
I have bethought me: I shall paint a piece  
. . . There's for you! Give me six months, then go, see  
Something in Sant' Ambrogio's! Bless the nun's!  
They want a cast of my office. I shall paint  
God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,  
Ringed by a bowery, flowery angel-brood,  
Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet  
As puff on puff of grated orris-root  
When ladies crowd to church at mid-summer.  
And then in the front, of course a saint or two—  
Saint John, because he saves the Florentines,  
Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white  
The convent's friends and gives them a long day,  
And Job, I must have him there past mistake,  
The man of Uz (and Us without the z,  
Painters who need his patience.) Well, all these  
Secured at their devotions, up shall come  
Out of a corner when you least expect,

As one by a dark stair into a great light,  
Music and talking, who but Lippo! I!—  
Mazed, motionless and moon-struck—I'm the man!  
Back I shrink—what is this I see and hear?  
I, caught up with my monk's things by mistake,  
My old serge gown and rope that goes all round,  
I, in this presence, this pure company!  
Where's a hole, where's a corner for escape?  
Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing  
Forward, puts out a soft palm—'Not so fast!'  
—Addresses the celestial presence, 'nay—  
He made you and devised you, after all,  
Though he's none of you! Could Saint John there, draw—  
His camel-hair make up a painting brush?  
We come to brother Lippo for all that,  
*Iste perfecit opus!*' So, all smile—  
I shuffle sideways with my blushing face  
Under the cover of a hundred wings  
Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you're gay  
And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,  
Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops  
The hothead husband! Thus I scuttle off  
To some safe bench behind, not letting go  
The palm of her, the little lily thing  
That spoke the good word for me in the nick,  
Like the Prior's niece . . . Saint Lucy, I would say.

And so all's saved for me, and for the church  
A pretty picture gained. Go, six months hence!  
Your hand, sir, and good-bye: no lights, no lights!  
The street's hushed, and I know my own way back,  
Don't fear me! There's the grey beginning. Zooks!



## ANDREA DEL SARTO

(CALLED 'THE FAULTLESS PAINTER.')

**B**UT do not let us quarrel any more,  
No, my Lucrezia; bear with me for once:  
Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.  
You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?  
I'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear,  
Treat his own subject after his own way,  
Fix his own time, accept to his own price,  
And shut the money into this small hand  
When next it takes mine. Will it? tenderly?  
Oh, I'll content him,—but to-morrow, Love!  
I often am much wearier than you think,  
This evening more than usual, and it seems  
As if—forgive now—should you let me sit  
Here by the window with your hand in mine  
And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole,  
Both of one mind, as married people use,  
Quietly, quietly, the evening through,  
I might get up to-morrow to my work  
Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.  
To-morrow how you shall be glad for this!  
Your soft hand is a woman of itself,  
And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside.

Don't count the time lost, either; you must serve  
For each of the five pictures we require—  
It saves a model. So! keep looking so—  
My serpentining beauty, rounds on rounds!  
—How could you ever prick those perfect ears,  
Even to put the pearl there! oh, so sweet—  
My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,  
Which everybody looks on and calls his,  
And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,  
While she looks—no one's: very dear, no less!  
You smile? why, there's my picture ready made.  
There's what we painters call our harmony!  
A common greyness silvers everything,—  
All in a twilight, you and I alike  
—You, at the point of your first pride in me  
(That's gone you know),—but I, at every point;  
My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down  
To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.  
There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;  
That length of convent-wall across the way  
Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;  
The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,  
And autumn grows, autumn in everything.  
Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape  
As if I saw alike my work and self  
And all that I was born to be and do,

A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand.  
How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead!  
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!  
I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie!  
This chamber for example—turn your head—  
All that's behind us! You don't understand  
Nor care to understand about my art,  
But you can hear at least when people speak;  
And that cartoon, the second from the door  
—It is the thing, Love! so such things should be—  
Behold Madonna,—I am bold to say.  
I can do with my pencil what I know,  
What I see, what at bottom of my heart  
I wish for, if I ever wish so deep—  
Do easily, too—when I say perfectly,  
I do not boast, perhaps: yourself are judge  
Who listened to the Legate's talk last week,  
And just as much they used to say in France.  
At any rate 'tis easy, all of it,  
No sketches first, no studies, that's long past—  
I do what many dream of all their lives  
—Dream? strive to do, and agonize to do,  
And fail in doing. I could count twenty such  
On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,  
Who strive—you don't know how the others strive  
To paint a little thing like that you smeared

Carelessly passing with your robes afloat,—  
Yet do much less, so much less, Someone says,  
(I know his name, no matter) so much less!  
Well, less is more, Lucrezia! I am judged.  
There burns a truer light of God in them,  
In their vexed, beating, stuffed and stopped-up brain,  
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt  
This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.  
Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,  
Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,  
Enter and take their place there sure enough,  
Though they come back and cannot tell the world.  
My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.  
The sudden blood of these men! at a word—  
Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.  
I, painting from myself and to myself,  
Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame  
Or their praise either. Somebody remarks  
Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,  
His hue mistaken—what of that? or else,  
Rightly traced and well ordered—what of that?  
Speak as they please, what does the mountain care?  
Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,  
Or what's a heaven for? All is silver-grey  
Placid and perfect with my art—the worse!  
I know both what I want and what might gain—



And yet how profitless to know, to sigh  
‘Had I been two, another and myself,  
Our head would have o’erlooked the world!’ No doubt.  
Yonder’s a work, now, of that famous youth  
The Urbinate who died five years ago.  
(’Tis copied, George Vasari sent it me.)  
Well, I can fancy how he did it all,  
Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,  
Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,  
Above and through his art—for it gives way;  
That arm is wrongly put—and there again—  
A fault to pardon in the drawing’s lines,  
Its body, so to speak: its soul is right,  
He means right—that, a child may understand.  
Still, what an arm! and I could alter it.  
But all the play, the insight and the stretch—  
Out of me! out of me! And wherefore out?  
Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,  
We might have risen to Rafael, I and you.  
Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think—  
More than I merit, yes, by many times.  
But had you—oh, with the same perfect brow,  
And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,  
And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird  
The fowler’s pipe, and follows to the snare—  
Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind!

Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged  
‘God and the glory! never care for gain.  
The present by the future, what is that?  
Live for fame, side by side with Angelo—  
Rafael is waiting. Up to God, all three!’  
I might have done it for you. So it seems—  
Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.  
Beside, incentives come from the soul’s self;  
The rest avail not. Why do I need you?  
What wife had Rafael, or has Angelo?  
In this world, who can do a thing, will not—  
And who would do it, cannot, I perceive:  
Yet the will’s somewhat—somewhat, too, the power—  
And thus we half-men struggle. At the end,  
God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.  
’Tis safer for me, if the award be strict,  
That I am something underrated here,  
Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.  
I dared not, do you know, leave home all day,  
For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.  
The best is when they pass and look aside;  
But they speak sometimes; I must bear it all.  
Well may they speak! That Francis, that first time,  
And that long festal year at Fontainebleau!  
I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,  
Put on the glory, Rafael’s daily wear,

In that humane great monarch's golden look,—  
One finger in his beard or twisted curl  
Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,  
One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,  
The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,  
I painting proudly with his breath on me,  
All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,  
Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls  
Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts,—  
And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,  
This in the background, waiting on my work,  
To crown the issue with a last reward!  
A good time, was it not, my kingly days?  
And had you not grown restless—but I know—  
'Tis done and past; 'twas right, my instinct said;  
Too live the life grew, golden and not grey,  
And I'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt  
Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.  
How could it end in any other way?  
You called me, and I came home to your heart.  
The triumph was, to have ended there; then if  
I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?  
Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold,  
You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!  
'Rafael did this, Andrea painted that—  
The Roman's is the better when you pray,

But still the other's Virgin was his wife—'  
Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge  
Both pictures in your presence; clearer grows  
My better fortune, I resolve to think.  
For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,  
Said one day Angelo, his very self,  
To Rafael . . . I have known it all these years . . .  
(When the young man was flaming out his thoughts  
Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,  
Too lifted up in heart because of it)  
'Friend, there's a certain sorry little scrub  
Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how,  
Who, were he set to plan and execute  
As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,  
Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!'  
To Rafael's!—And indeed the arm is wrong.  
I hardly dare—yet, only you to see,  
Give the chalk here—quick, thus the line should go!'  
Ay, but the soul! he's Rafael! rub it out!  
Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,  
(What he? why, who but Michael Angelo?  
Do you forget already words like those?)  
If really there was such a chance, so lost,—  
Is, whether you're—not grateful—but more pleased.  
Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed!  
This hour has been an hour! Another smile?



If you would sit thus by me every night  
I should work better, do you comprehend?  
I mean that I should earn more, give you more.  
See, it is settled dusk now; there's a star;  
Morello's gone, the watch-lights show the wall,  
The cue-owls speak the name we call them by.  
Come from the window, Love,—come in, at last,  
Inside the melancholy little house  
We built to be so gay with. God is just.  
King Francis may forgive me. Oft at nights  
When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,  
The walls become illumined, brick from brick  
Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,  
That gold of his I did cement them with!  
Let us but love each other. Must you go?  
That Cousin here again? he waits outside?  
Must see you—you, and not with me? Those loans?  
More gaming debts to pay? you smiled for that?  
Well, let smiles buy me! have you more to spend?  
While hand and eye and something of a heart  
Are left me, work's my ware, and what's it worth?  
I'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit  
The grey remainder of the evening out,  
Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly  
How I could paint, were I but back in France,  
One picture, just one more—the Virgin's face,

Not your's this time ! I want you at my side  
To hear them—that is, Michael Angelo—  
Judge all I do and tell you of its worth.  
Will you? To-morrow, satisfy your friend.  
I take the subjects for his corridor,  
Finish the portrait out of hand—there, there,  
And throw him in another thing or two  
If he demurs; the whole should prove enough  
To pay for this same Cousin's freak. Beside,  
What's better and what's all I care about,  
Get you the thirteen scudi for the ruff.  
Love, does that please you? Ah, but what does he,  
The Cousin ! what does he to please you more?

I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.  
I regret little, I would change still less.  
Since there my past life lies, why alter it?  
The very wrong to Francis!—it is true  
I took his coin, was tempted and complied,  
And built this house and sinned, and all is said.  
My father and my mother died of want.  
Well, had I riches of my own? you see  
How one gets rich ! Let each one bear his lot.  
They were born poor, lived poor, and poor they died :  
And I have laboured somewhat in my time  
And not been paid profusely. Some good son

Paint my two hundred pictures—let him try!  
No doubt, there's something strikes a balance. Yes,  
You loved me quite enough, it seems to-night.  
This must suffice me here. What would one have?  
In Heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance—  
Four great walls in the New Jerusalem  
Meted on each side by the angel's reed,  
For Leonard, Rafael, Angelo and me  
To cover—the three first without a wife,  
While I have mine! So—still they overcome  
Because there's still Lucrezia,—as I choose.  
Again the Cousin's whistle! Go, my Love.





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